

# **Garbage Gazette**

## **Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection**

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### **Taking the "Waste" Out of Your Budget: It might be easier than you think**

**PAYT - The Budget Miracle-Worker** - Reduce local taxes, save residents money and contribute to a healthier environment - all at the same time. Sound too good to be true? It isn't. Pay-as-you-throw programs (PAYT) for trash do exactly that. By initiating unit-based pricing for garbage, also known as "pay-as-you-throw", public officials can achieve a number of important goals, including:

- reducing disposal costs financed through the tax base
- eliminating the amount of waste requiring disposal by up to an estimated six percent
- dramatically increasing the amount of materials that are recycled
- creating an equitable way for residents to pay for waste disposal
- eliminating paying for out-of-town trash

In these times of deficit budgets, officials are searching for ways to maintain services for residents without raising taxes. *PAYT is a way public officials can remove a costly line item from the town budget at the same time it provides a more equitable way for residents to pay for garbage removal.*

"There are two things we have absolutely no control over," said Dana Hallenbeck, Director of Public Works for the Town of West Hartford. "Winter weather and how much waste we have to dispose. I can't do anything about the weather, but I can do something about waste." Hallenbeck is one of a growing number of public officials throughout the state who is exploring how PAYT could benefit the community.

PAYT is growing in popularity nationwide, with almost 6,000 programs in operation. But PAYT isn't yet a household word in Connecticut. Here in Connecticut a handful of towns have some sort of PAYT program at transfer stations, but only four, including Stonington, Mansfield, Coventry and Putnam, have town-wide PAYT including trash that is collected curbside.

**PAYT - A More Equitable Solution.** Ask any resident if he or she thinks they should



be charged the same amount for long distance charges or in electricity, as their neighbor, no matter how much they consume, and they'll all tell you the same thing - *absolutely not*. Yet, when it comes to paying for garbage, that's exactly what many residents are doing - paying the same no matter

no how much they throw out. And, if disposal costs are included in the tax base, residents are paying for waste disposal not according to how much they generate, but according to the type of house they live in and the type of car they drive. Educate residents to this fact and, chances are, they'll want a new system.

"When people have the opportunity to control their own costs in an effective manner, they just feel better about things," said Peter Dibble, First Selectman of the Town of Stonington. Dibble was First Selectman when the town implemented its PAYT program back in 1992. "From a political perspective, there was absolutely no negative impact on my administration or on me personally [from PAYT]. There are so many positives about this program. As a politician, this is one of the achievements I am most proud of."

**PAYT is as simple as it sounds - residents simply pay for how much they throw away.** In a PAYT program, residents purchase special bags or stickers, or pay a set fee for a container that is dependent upon the size of the container. The cost of disposal is built directly into the cost of the bag, sticker or container. If residents recycle and compost, they save money because they buy fewer bags or stickers, or require a smaller container. Residents who recycle won't be subsidizing those who don't through their local property taxes or through a fixed garbage disposal fee that is the same for everyone. **Residents favor the program for three reasons: It's fair; it puts the control over how much a resident spends on garbage directly into his or her hands; and most residents save money.**

**PAYT - Cuts Disposal Taxes Down to Size.** With a PAYT program, a municipality can take disposal costs completely out of the tax base and fund them through



the PAYT program. Since municipalities or residents pay for garbage disposal by the ton, the savings can be significant when residents reduce their trash. Keeping disposal costs out of the town budget means that property taxes are no longer tied to costs beyond the town's control, and don't have to rise every time disposal costs go up. The savings can be applied to other services or to lower taxes.

**PAYT - Gives the Environment a Break.** When residents have a financial incentive to



trim their trash, they begin to recycle and compost more and pay more attention to product packaging. PAYT programs can raise a municipality's recycling rate to between 40% and 45%. And, producing less garbage due to increased recycling and source reduction can reduce air and water pollution and eliminate the need for expanded resource recovery capacity in the state. Reducing the need for additional resource recovery capacity means a cleaner environment for residents.

**Overcoming Barriers.** Despite all its advantages, implementing a PAYT program can still appear daunting to some public officials. There can be resistance from residents who don't want change or officials may fear illegal dumping. The good news is that these programs usually have not resulted in illegal dumping and that there are solutions for most program barriers. And, once residents have gotten used to PAYT, they don't want to go back to the old system.

A resident in Mansfield, Conn., where PAYT has been in operation since 1990, originally opposed the program. After living with PAYT, however, she changed her mind: "I would resent a system where we all paid the same amount ... I feel PAYT is very fair. It also makes an average person like me want to compost and reduce their garbage to get a financial benefit."

DEP has developed a variety of resources for municipalities interested in PAYT. If you're interested in learning more, call Nan Peckham (860-424-3357) or Judy Belaval (860-424-3237) at the DEP or Ellen O'Meara (860-350-5166). If you are a resident and want PAYT in your town, contact your local elected officials and let them know.

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